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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION THAI POLITICS - TOKYO

LEAD STORIES: Most Wednesday morning papers front-paged reports from Bangkok concerning Thai Prime Minister Thaksin's announcement Tuesday evening that he would resign.

¶1. "Elections Should be Held Again in Thailand for Political Reconciliation" An editorial in the liberal Asahi commented (4/5): "Thai Prime Minister Thaksin announced his resignation from office Tuesday following the discovery of large numbers of blank votes, which were seen as criticism of his administration. Thaksin made clear that he would not seek the post of prime minister in the next national assembly, saying that he has decided to step down for national reconciliation. It was an abrupt exit for a leader who had expressed his readiness to again take the reins of government after declaring victory in the general election, which netted his party at least 57 percent of the vote. Thaksin announced his resignation after meeting with King Bhumibol at his palace in suburban Bangkok. It is fair to conclude that the embattled prime minister decided to resign at the king's advice....

¶2. "There was no way to resolve the post-election political chaos in Thailand without Mr. Thaksin stepping down and general elections being held again with the participation of opposition parties, and, in fact, calls for such an approach had been growing in business circles.... For now, we welcome the emergence of prospects for stabilizing the country's political situation. Thailand, together with Malaysia and Singapore, is a core member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and is expected to play an important role in the creation of a regional community eyed for 2020. Moreover, Thailand has, in principle,

agreed to conclude a free trade agreement with Japan, while using its geopolitical position to promote economic cooperation with China and India. The longer the political confusion continues, the less likely Thailand will be able to act as a bridge among these countries."

SCHIEFFER